

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

7 DEC 1974

Executive Registry

74-6583

MEMORANDUM FOR: Lt. General Daniel O. Graham, USA
Director
Defense Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT : Your Request for Declassification
Action, dated 26 September 1974

I have carefully studied your request for a determination as to whether certain portions of the Secretary of Defense's Posture Statements for FYs 1963-1973, dealing with the strategic threat from the USSR and China, can be declassified and released, as requested by Morton H. Halperin. My basic conclusions are as follows:

1. There would be strong basis for objection if the request were for declassification of the actual estimates on which these passages were based -- i.e., the annual NIEs on Soviet and Chinese strategic military forces -- particularly within ten years of publication. In my view, these NIEs, because of the critical importance of their subject matter, their comprehensiveness, the all-source basis on which they are constructed and their detailed discussion of intelligence methods, have a sensitivity far transcending that of most other intelligence documents.

2. On the other hand, the Secretary of Defense's annual Posture Statements are policy documents which draw only selectively on the NIEs and in fact are routinely subjected to sanitization and declassification for publication in the transcripts of the hearings in which they were presented. Thus, the question becomes one of whether further declassification would be appropriate.

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3. From the standpoint of protecting sensitive intelligence sources and methods, I can see no objection to declassification and release, for the years given, of one major category of material which has been routinely deleted from the unclassified versions of the Posture Statements -- the assessments of the growth and potential ultimate size of major Soviet strategic force components -- i.e., ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers. Despite their undoubted sensitivity at the time they were issued, these estimates are now of only historical significance; except for one table -- drawn from the DIPP rather than the NIEs -- none of the projections goes past mid-1973. Although they reveal past uncertainties and sometimes divisions over how to assess the Soviet strategic buildup, they reveal no factual material the Soviets don't know we have. I also can see no objection to the declassification of the comparable discussion of Chinese force levels.

4. With respect to the descriptive material on Soviet and Chinese strategic forces in the Posture Statements, the Statements for FYs 1971-73 have already been extensively declassified, reflecting an increased recent willingness to acknowledge U.S. ability to collect important kinds of information by national technical means. In my view, the Department of Defense would be justified in asserting that little if any further declassification could be made of these Statements without jeopardizing the results if not the existence of sensitive intelligence sources and methods. On the other hand, I can see no objection to the Department of Defense's declassifying much of the previously withheld descriptive material in earlier Posture Statements, using the same standards and procedures used to protect sensitive sources and methods with more recent Posture Statements.

5. Accordingly, I have no objection to the declassification and release of the Posture Statements in question along the lines outlined above.

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6. Under the circumstances, I see no need for formal USIB review of the documents in question. However, your request does call attention to some fundamental issues that USIB members should be thinking about. Accordingly, I propose to circulate this memorandum, and an attached staff memorandum, for USIB discussion at an early date.

/s/ W. E. Colby

W. E. Colby

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Request for Declassification Action

The Problem

1. By memorandum of 26 September, General Graham has requested USIB review of a request by Morton H. Halperin for declassification and release of those portions of the Secretary of Defense's annual Posture Statements to Congress for Fiscal Years 1963-1973 which deal with the strategic threat from the USSR and China. Mr. Halperin's request was evidently prompted by an invitation from the magazine Foreign Policy to reply to an article by Albert Wohlstetter ("Is There a Strategic Arms Race?") which appeared in its Summer 1974 issue. The basic thesis of Mr. Wohlstetter's article is that the U.S. has systematically underestimated the growth and ultimate size of the Soviet ICBM and SLBM forces and has persistently understated the future strength of the strategic bomber force by postulating a phasing out of older models which never materialized. This conclusion is derived from a series of 30 charts evaluating 51 long-range "predictions" of ICBM, SLBM and bomber strength which appeared in the Secretary of Defense's Posture Statements for FY 1963-1972 inclusive. These charts, prepared at a SECRET level, were downgraded to unclassified by the Department of Defense for Mr. Wohlstetter's use.

2. All but the FY 1963 Posture Statement draw clearly and explicitly on the then current strategic military National Intelligence Estimates, with particular reference to the Intelligence Community's judgments at the time of the existing and prospective size of major Soviet strategic force components. Thus the request by Mr. Halperin, now research director of

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the Twentieth Century Fund's study on national security, raises some fundamental questions as to how we handle our responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act -- questions that are bound to recur as time goes on. Mr. Halperin will almost certainly argue that he is entitled to the same access as Mr. Wohlstetter and that the information he wants can be released without damage to legitimate security requirements. Indeed, he has specifically called attention, in a brief note in the Fall issue of Foreign Policy, to his request for release of the Posture Statements cited by Mr. Wohlstetter. Failure to deal responsibly and defensibly with his request, in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, could lead to court action and increased Congressional pressures for speedier declassification procedures.

General Findings

3. As a general proposition, the annual strategic military NIEs themselves should probably continue to be regarded as representing a special order of sensitivity, because of their comprehensiveness and virtually unparalleled status as all-source documents. They are typically bulky publications designed to provide the President and his advisors with all relevant details on how our critical intelligence judgments were derived. Thus their special quality reflects not only the sensitivity of the individual items of intelligence contained in them but their breadth and depth of coverage.

4. For practical purposes of supporting the policy-makers, to be sure, we have in the past published sanitized TOP SECRET versions of many of these estimates, and we allow material derived from them, suitably sanitized, to appear in SECRET and even unclassified versions of documents like the Secretary of Defense's Posture Statements. But the NIEs themselves should not be considered subject to declassification until they no longer provide a good basis for assessing the Intelligence Community's present and future overall capabilities and limitations in the strategic intelligence field. After ten years, good grounds perhaps

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might be found for declassification on a case-by-case basis. Over shorter periods the older estimate would more and more resemble the current version.

5. The Posture Statements, however, are policy documents which draw selectively from the estimates and are thus more open to item-by-item declassification action. In varying degree, they have already been routinely sanitized and downgraded from SECRET for publication in the unclassified transcript of the Congressional hearings at which they were presented. Indeed, beginning with Secretary Laird's FY 1971 Posture Statement, the unclassified version of which includes a 21-page annex on the "size and character of the threat," the bulk of the classified texts have been released, reflecting greatly increased willingness to acknowledge the ability of national technical collection systems to count ICBM sites, monitor missile tests, and the like. Some deployment numbers have been rounded and simplified, and a number of other details have properly been omitted to protect the results if not the existence of sensitive collection and analytical procedures. In these later Posture Statements, however, the only major omissions have been the discussions of future force levels. This is of particular relevance with the FY 1971 presentation, the classified version of which contains a table showing explicitly how earlier projections of Soviet ICBM and SLBM strength had had to be revised upward as new deployment data became available.

6. Mr. Halperin's request thus poses three questions:

- How sensitive, from the point of view of protecting intelligence sources and methods, are the estimates of possible future force levels which Mr. Halperin is presumably most interested in obtaining?
- What basis, if any, is there for further declassifying the descriptive material in the later (FY 1971-1973) Posture Statements?

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- What problems, if any, would be created by attempting to declassify the descriptive material in earlier Posture Statements, using the standards applied with the FY 1971 statement and subsequently to protect sensitive data?

Specific Findings

7. A review of the classified discussions of the current and future Soviet force levels contained in the Posture Statements provides no persuasive basis for objecting to their declassification and release. This is true despite their undoubted sensitivity at the time of their initial presentation, their revelation of differences within the Intelligence Community (as in the evidence of dissenting Army and Air Force views in the FY 1964 Statement), their failure at various times to fully anticipate what actually developed, and the possible inclusion of some minor errors of observation in describing the status of strategic deployments at the times the estimates of future force growth were made. The Soviets are well aware of our ability to monitor the buildup of their strategic forces, and any additional insight they might derive from these documents about how close to the mark we were in the period up through early 1972 are likely to be of only historical interest. The "predictions" of future force levels, both in the early years and in the later period in which alternative projections were constructed, ultimately reflect the subjective judgments of analysts and their superiors about which was almost universally acknowledged to be a highly uncertain future. The only projections in the Posture Statements in question which go past mid-1973 are those in a DIPP table used in the FY 1972 Statement -- presented in March 1971, well over a year before the SALT Interim Agreement limits came into effect -- which projects ICBM, SLBM and heavy bomber figures for mid-1972, mid-1974 and mid-1976.

8. From the standpoint of protection of the security of USIB materials, there would appear to be

no basis for objection to the Department of Defense's declassifying the descriptive material in the pre-FY 1971 Posture Statements, using the same standards and procedures it employed in sanitizing the FY 1971 and later Posture Statements to protect sensitive sources and methods -- even though such declassification would presumably confirm the existence of some historical uncertainties in the Intelligence Community on such subjects as the mission of the Tallinn system.

9. The Department of Defense would appear to be justified if it were to refuse further declassification of the FY 1971-1973 Posture Statements except for the release of the analytical chart on ICBM and SLBM projections contained in the appendix to the FY 1971 Statement. Although the continuing validity of a few deletions might now be questioned, the bulk of them appear to be fully justified.

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4 December 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

SUBJECT : [] Declassification Paper

1. On 26 September, General Graham wrote you requesting USIB review of certain portions of the Secretary of Defense's Posture Statements for FYs 1963-1973 for declassification as requested by Mr. Morton Halperin.

2. Because of the extensive amount of material that had to be examined carefully before a response could be made to this request, I asked [] to serve in a consultant capacity and take on this task. He has now done so and makes the following two recommendations:

a. That you reply to General Graham as indicated in the attached letter prepared for your signature.

b. That you circulate to the USIB (along with copies of your response to General Graham) a separate memorandum, also attached, for early discussion of the issues involved.

3. [] recommendations are thoughtful and well considered. They have been thoroughly checked with all interested components of the NIO structure, the DDI, the DDS&T, the DDA, the IC Staff, the General Counsel and the Legislative Counsel. The texts appended to this note have been reviewed and endorsed by all of the above.

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25X1 4. Please note that [] proposal has you responding to General Graham as DCI rather than as Chairman of the USIB, even though his request was endorsed to you in the latter capacity. This nuance reflects a point made by several people, including [] that it is as DCI that you submit NIEs and are vested with a statutory responsibility for protecting sensitive sources and methods.

25X1 5. [] has done an excellent piece of work and I find his recommendations persuasive. We have taken considerable care in preparing your response in this particular case since it will doubtless set a precedent with which we will have to live in the future. The amount of coordination involved has been time-consuming but necessary.

[]
George A. Carver, Jr.

Deputy for National Intelligence Officers

Attachments

O/D/DCI/NIO:GACarver/mee 4 December 1974

Distribution

Original of Attachments to General Daniel O. Graham

- 1 - DDCI
- ✓ 1 - ER
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